

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
BIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON

THE TYPE LOCALITY OF *BISON BISON* LINNAEUS

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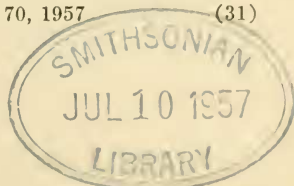
The basis for the name *Bison bison* Linnaeus (1758:72) was restricted by Thomas (1911:154) to the "'*Taurus mexicanus*' of Hernandez, Mexico, p. 587." Accordingly, he declared "'Mexico,'" with the reservations implied by his quotation marks, the type locality of the species.

Designation of México as type locality has met with valid objections. Bison do not live now within the present confines of México and there is no positive evidence that they ever did in historic time. The question of their distribution has been examined recently by Reed (1952:390) and by Baker (1956:325). The first rejected México and substituted southern or southeastern United States as type locality. The second demurred and held for northeastern México as a proper restriction. Each authority cited a number of documents in support of his opinion but neither applied to the primary Linnaean source for the description of the bison and the details of its habitat.

The full title of the work cited by Linnæus is *Rerum Medicarum Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus sui Plantarum Animalium Mineralium Mexicanorum Historia*, by Francisco Hernández, published 1651, in Rome. The page reference is 587.

At the head of the page cited appears a woodcut of a bison under the Latin title *Taurus Mexicanus*. The first paragraph of the account that follows is a description of the animal by Ionnes Faber, one of the editors of the Hernández manuscript. His opening sentence explains that the original from which the figure was copied bore no name either Latin or Mexican. After 10 pages devoted to a review of wild and domestic cattle in general, the author declares that bison like the one described and figured are to be found in the New World province of Quivira. Inasmuch as the publication is devoted primarily to a description of Mexican plants, animals and minerals, the bison, in Faber's opinion, should also be called Mexican rather than by the more general denomination, American. This explains the controversial title *Taurus Mexicanus*. Faber also informs that bison were reported from Florida where they are called *butrol*.

The elaborate dissertation on cattle by editor Faber was inspired by the brief account of bison written by Hernández himself and included in the first treatise of the addendum to the same volume. This section



of the published parts of the original manuscript by *Hernández* bears the title *Historiae Animalium et Mineralium Novae Hispaniae*. The bison is described in chapter 30, page 10, as follows, translated from Latin.

“The Cattle of the Quivira Region

“(Concerning one of them, see page 587 above, by Io. Faber).

“When the Spaniards entered in these regions [i.e. the Coronado expedition to the Quivira], they encountered, among other marvelous things, herds of wild cattle of moderate size with humped back, thick mane and long dewlap. The color of the whole body is dark; the meat is not inferior in taste or less wholesome than that of our own cattle. The natives first drink the blood then eat the meat raw and they use the hides for protecting their bodies against the cold. I have heard that one of these cattle was brought to Philip the Great [the one figured and described by Faber] and that a race of hump backed men are also to be found beyond the river Acunchis.”

The Quivira Region has been identified as the site of villages of Wichita Indians in central Kansas. According to Indian tales, these settlements contained fabulous wealth in precious metals. Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, who sought them in 1541, found only rich soil, primitive Indians and wild cattle. Indeed, Coronado and his men were the first Europeans to see the immense herds of American bison (cf. Bolton, 1949:282). *Hernández* who lived in México during the last half of the 16th century may have learned about bison directly from members of Coronado's party.

The exact locality of the “type” of *Bison bison Linnaeus*, therefore, is the ancient “Quivira Region,” then “Mexico,” now central Kansas. This may be regarded as the precise *type locality*.

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